

## Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 TUNIS 00073 01 OF 03 051854Z  
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W  
-----077174 051857Z /42

O R 051810Z JAN 78  
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9459  
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
AMEMBASSY RABAT  
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 TUNIS 0073

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2 (IMP DET)  
TAGS: PFOR TS  
SUBJECT: BACKGROUND ON TUNISIAN CABINET CRISIS

REF: TUNIS 070

1. SUMMARY: IN MOST REMARTTLE CONVERSATION I HAVE HAD DURING THIS TOUR IN TUNISIA, BOURGUIBA, JR. PROVIDED ME WITH AN EXPOSE OF THE PLOT, BACKED BY COLONEL QADHAFI, AND ENGINEERED BY BELKHODJA, MASMOUDI AND ACHOUR TO BRING DOWN THE NOUIRA GOVERNMENT AND, UNDER TAHAR BELKHODJA, TO SET UP A VERY LEFTIST SOCIALIST REGIME. FUELING A TAKE-OVER ARE LARGE NUMBERS OF TUNISIANS TRAINED BY OR BLACKMAILED BY LIBYA WHO WERE SENT BACK INTO TUNISIA TO BE READY WHEN CALLED UPON. HE ATTRIBUTED THE FIRING OF MINISTERS CHATTY, LASRAM AND ENNACEUR CHIEFLY TO CORREUPTION AND REPORTED TUNISIA'S ESPOUSAL OF SADAT'S PEACE MOVES IN THE MIDDLE EAST. END SUMMARY.

2. THE PLOT: HABIB BOURGUIBA, JR. SON OF THE PRESIDENT AND RECENTLY NAMED "SPECIAL ADVISOR TO THE PRESIDENT"

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ASKED ME TO REMAIN BEHIND AT THE PALACE THIS MORNING FOR HIS PROMISED TALK WITH ME ON THE DETAILS OF THE PLOT BEHIND THE RECENT EXTENSIVE TUNISIAN CABINET RESHUFFLING (REFTEL NOTAL). THE STORY HE UNFOLDED, HE SAID, REPRESENTS INFORMATION WHICH HE FELT IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT I, AS A FRIEND OF TUNISIA, AND MY GOVERNMENT SHOULD HAVE FOR A FULL UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE RECENT CABINET CRISIS.

3. SINCE ABOUT MAY 1, 1977 QADHAFI HAS GONE TO GREAT PAINS TO "PUFF UP" THE TOP TUNISIAN LABOR MOVEMENT LEADER, HABIB ACHOUR. FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER MOHAMED MASMOUDI, WHO HAS BEEN FOR SEVERAL YEARS IN THE EMPLOY OF LIBYA, PROVED A WILLING TOOL AND GO-BETWEEN. AT A CERTAIN STAGE EARLY IN THE GAME INTERIOR MINISTER TAHAR BELKHODJA WAS ENLISTED SINCE NEITHER QADHAFI NOR MASMOUDI BELIEVED ACHOUR ON HIS OWN WAS COMPETENT ENOUGH TO SEE THROUGH A BLOW AIMED AT "ISOLATING HEDI NOUIRA BY MAKING LIFE MISERABLE FOR HIM AND FORCING HIM TO STEP DOWN FROM THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP". THE PROGRAM, WHICH IS ALL NOW DOCUMENTABLE ACCORDING TO BOURGUIBA, JR. CALLED FOR A SERIES OF WILDCAT STRIKES BEGINNING IN SEPTEMBER. BELKHODJA'S MAIN ROLE WAS TO INSURE THAT INSUFFICIENT NUMBER OF POLICE WERE AVAILABLE AT THE SCENE OF PLANNED STRIKES. THIS WAS THE REASON WHY MILITARY FORCE HAD TO BE EMPLOYED AT KSAR HELLAL DURING THE SOGITEX STRIKE WHICH WE HAVE REPORTED.

4. FROM THAT LABOR POINT OF VIEW, ONE OF THE UNION GENERALE DES TRAVAILLEURS TUNISIENS (UGTT) LEADERSHIP'S CHIEF OBJECTIVES WAS TO ADVANCE BY DEGREE A CAMPAIGN FOR "CO-GESTION", UNDER WHICH LABOR WOULD SHARE DIRECTLY IN THE MANAGEMENT OF INDUSTRIES AND CERTAIN NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS. LESS THAN THREE DAYS AFTER TUNISIA'S "SOCIAL PACT" WAS SIGNED LAST FEBRUARY THE UGTT SENT A THREE-MAN DELEGATION TO YUGOSLAVIA  
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TO STUDY "CO-GESTION" AS PRACTICED THERE. THIS, SAID BOURGUIBA, JR., WOULD HAVE MEANT AN END TO DESTOURIAN SOCIALISM AND THE INTRODUCTION OF MARXIST PRINCIPLES INTO TUNISIAN SOCIETY.

5. THE FOREGOING FACTS WERE KNOWN TO THE PRESIDENT AND PRIME MINISTER FOR SOME MONTHS. ONLY SINCE THE CABINET CRISIS HAS IT BEEN KNOWN THAT TAHAR BELKHODJA HAS ENGAGED FOR OVER TWO AND A HALF YEARS IN POLICE-STATE METHODS TO PUT HIMSELF IN A POSITION OF STRENGTH AGAINST THE DAY WHEN HE COULD BRING DOWN NOUIRA AND REPLACE HIM. MUCH OF THE STORY HAS BEEN REVEALED TO THE GOVT ONLY IN THE PAST FEW DAYS BY MONCEF BEL HADJ AMOR, FORMER MINISTER AND SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE GOVERNMENT, WHO WAS DISMISSED. BEL HADJ AMOR, I WAS TOLD, HAS SOLACED HIMSELF OVER THE LOSS OF HIS CAREER BY DRINKING HEAVILY. HE SO MUCH REGRETS HIS PAST CONDUCT THAT HE HAS MADE A CLEAN BREAST OF THE ROLE HE PLAYED IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE UNDER BELKHODJA'S DIRECTION. HE CONTROLLED ALL VISITORS TO THE PRIME MINISTER AND ALL PAPERS GOING OVER HIS DESK. HE REPORTED REGULARLY TO BELKHODJA ON ALL ASPECTS OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S ACTIVITY AND KEPT DOSSIERS ON KEY POLITICAL FIGURES INTENDED TO BE OF

SUBSEQUENT USE AS BLACKMAIL. BOURGUIBA, JR. SAID HE HAD SEEN THE DOSSIER BEING KEPT ON HIMSELF. MOREOVER, BEL HADJ AMOR HAS CONFESSED THAT HE AND BELKHODJA WERE AWARE IN ADVANCE OF THE MARCH 1976 LIBYAN PLOT TO KILL NOUIRA. THIS WAS TO HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT, NOT BY SHOOTING, BUT BY STRANGULATION.

6. ONE OF THE KEY FIGURES, DESCRIBED AS THE "EMINENCE GRISE", WAS FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENSE, AHMED BENNOUR, WHO WAS ALWAYS KNOWN TO BE A PROTEGE OF BELKHODJA. BENNOUR HAD MANY FRIENDS IN BOTH THE POLICE AND MILITARY AND COULD HAVE PLAYED A KEY ROLE ON THE SECURITY FRONT AT SUCH TIME AS THE PLOTTERS CHOSE TO MOVE. THROUGH BENNOUR, ABDELMAJID BOUSLAMA, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE SURETE NATIONALE, WAS BROUGHT INTO THE PLOT AND WOULD RECEIVE INSTRUCTIONS,  
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BENNOUR HIMSELF HAVING PREVIOUSLY OCCUPIED THAT KEY SECURITY POST.

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W  
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9460  
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
AMEMBASSY RABAT  
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 3 TUNIS 0073

EXDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

7. I ASKED BOURGUIBA, JR. AT THIS POINT WHETHER THE GOT HAD PLACED ANY OF THE PERSONS MENTIONED UNDER ARREST OR

HOUSE ARREST. HE STATED THAT THE GOT "WANTS TO CREATE NO NEW MARYRS", THAT NONE HAD BEEN ARRESTED YET BUT ALL WERE BEING KEPT UNDER CLOSE SURVEILLANCE. THEIR MOVEMENTS AND THEIR CONTACTS WERE BEING MINUTELY OBSERVED. IN DUE COURSE, HE SAID, IT MIGHT BE NECESSARY TO ARREST AND PREFER CHARGES AGAINST SOME OF THEM. ONE METHOD THE GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN PROVES TO BE EFFECTIVE. THE LARGE NUMBER OF FORMER OFFICERS OF THE GARDE NATIONALE, WHICH BELKHODJA BROUGHT UNDER GENERAL POLICE ADMINISTRATION, WHO WERE FORCIBLY RETIRED, ARE BEING BROUGHT BACK INTO GOVERNMENT SERVICE IN "PLAINCLOTHES" CAPACITIES. IT IS BELIEVED THAT THEIR ANTI-BELKHODJA OUTLOOK AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO PERFORM FURTHER SERVICE TOWARD MORE SUBSTANTIAL PENSIONS WILL GREATLY ENHANCE STATE SECURITY AT THIS CRITICAL STAGE.

8. ANOTHER MEMBER OF THE BELKHODJA-ACHOUR-MASMOUDI PLOT HAS BEEN HASSEN MEMMI, MAYOR OF TUNIS, WHOM BOURGUIBA, JR. DESCRIBES  
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AS "BELKHODJA'S PIMP". THE AXE HAS NOT YET FALLEN ON MEMMI BUT WILL SHORTLY.

9. LIBYAN INFLUENCE: NEXT BOURGUIBA, JR. INFORMED ME IN ANSWER TO MY QUERY REGARDING THE EXTENT OF LIBYAN INVOLVEMENT, THAT A RECENT JOINT AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE UGTT AND ITS LIBYAN COUNTERPART CALLED FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A "REJECTION FRONT" DESIGNED TO BRING DOWN PRESIDENT SADAT. IT CALLED ALSO FOR THE OPENING IN TRIPOLI OF A UGTT BRANCH OFFICE WHICH WOULD BE HOUSED INITIALLY IN THE LIBYAN LABOR MOVEMENT'S HEADQUARTERS BUILDING UNTIL A SUITABLE BUILDING COULD BE FOUND. IN LEAGUE WITH THE LIBYAN MOVEMENT, THE UGTT WOULD WORK AMONG TWO CATEGORIES OF TUNISIAN LABORERS IN LIBYA; THOSE LEGALLY IN LIBYA, WHOM THEY WOULD INDUCE TO RETURN TO TUNISIA AND WORK FOR THE TAKE-OVER OF THE NOUIRA REGIME AND THOSE ILLEGALLY IN LIBYA WHO WOULD BE BLACKMAILED INTO TAKING MILITARY AND TERRORIST TRAINING AT CERTAIN LIBYAN CENTERS AND SENT BACK TO TUNISIA FOR USE WHEN NEEDED. THE GOT HAS CAREFULLY ANALYZED OVER 4,000 CASES OF TUNISIAN WORKERS WHO HAVE BEEN EXPELLED FROM LIBYA SINCE LAST OCTOBER. MANY OF THEM, WHO ARE SUSPECTED OF HAVING BEEN TRAINED IN THE CENTERS MENTIONED, FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS TO REPORT LIBYAN MISTREATMENT TO TUNISIAN AUTHORITIES ON THEIR RETURN IN AN EFFORT TO ABSOLVE THEMSELVES OF SUSPICION. THE GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO BUILD UP ITS DOSSIERS ON MANY SUCH CASES AND IS CONTINUING TO ANALYZE THIS UNDOUBTED LIBYAN MOVE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DESTABILIZATION OF TUNISIA.

10. CORRUPTION: WHEN I TOLD BOURGUIBA, JR. THAT WE AND MOST OTHER OBSERVERS ARE IN THE DARK CONCERNING THE

NUMBER OF FORMER CABINET MEMBERS WHO RESIGNED ALLEGEDLY  
IN SYMPATHY WITH BELKHODJA AND THOSE WHO WERE SIMPLY FIRED,  
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HE SAID THAT I COULD IMMEDIATELY PUT IN THE SECOND CATEGORY  
FONFIN CHATTY, NATIONAL ECONOMY MINISTRY LASRAM AND SOCIAL  
AFFAIRS MINISTER ENNACEUR. CHATTY HAD BEEN KNOWN FOR SOME  
TIME TO BE PROFITEERING WITH THE HELP OF THE LOCAL CITROEN  
MANAGER ON SALES OF SMUGGLED CARPETS AND JEWELRY. HE  
SPECIFIED THAT THE MONEY AND JEWELS (WHICH HE ALLEGED  
BELONGED TO HIS WIFE STOLEN FROM HIS NEW YORK HOTEL ROOM  
IN OCTOBER 1976) REPRESENTED COMMODITIES AND PROCEEDS INVOLVED  
IN HIS ILLICIT TRAFFIC. LASRAM'S POSITION HAD ENABLED HIM  
TO SIPHON OFF FIVE AND TEN PERCENT BRIBES IN NUMEROUS  
TRANSACTIONS IN RECENT YEARS. ENNACEUR WAS ALSO GUILTY OF  
CORRUPTION ALTHOUGH HIS SINS WENT UNSPECIFIED.

11. BOURGUIBA, JR. THEN TOLD ME THAT ONE OF HIS CHIEF  
MANDATES FROM HIS FATHER WAS TO "CLEAN UP CORRUPTION" AMONG  
GOVT OFFICIALS. HE TOLD THE PRESIDENT HE WOULD REFUSE TO DO  
SO UNLESS HE WOULD BE ABLE TO INVOKE "SANCTIONS" AGAINST  
KNOWN OFFENDERS. THE PRESIDENT AGREED TO BACK HIM FULLY  
AND TO ENFORCE ANTI-CORRUPTION LAWS.

12. CHATTY AND SADAT: CONTRIBUTING ALSO TO CHATTY'S  
DOWNFALL, BOURGUIBA, JR. SAID, WAS HIS POOR HANDLING OF  
THE IMPORTANT ISSUE OF PRESIDENT SADAT'S GESTURES OF  
PEACE TOWARDS ISRAEL. TUNISIA WILL NOT SUDDENTLY REVERSE  
THE TIMID POSITION IT HAS PUBLICLY ESPOUSED, ALTHOUGH IT  
WILL IN TIME DO SO. HOWEVER, SADAT NOW HAS BEEN MADE  
FULLY AWARE, SINCE CHATTY'S DEPARTURE, THAT TUNISIA FULLY  
SUPPORTS HIS PEACE EFFORTS.

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W  
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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9461  
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
AMEMBASSY RABAT  
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

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EXDIS

13. COMMENT: I HAVE NO REASON TO DOUBT ANY OF THE FOREGOING INFORMATION. IT WAS ALL RECORDED ON NOTE PAPER AT MY INTER-LOCUTOR'S INVITATION TO INSURE ABSOLUTE ACCURACY. READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH OUR EARLIER REPORTING OP THE CABINET CRISIS, THIS SHAMEFUL STORY PIECES TOGETHER MOST OF THE MISSING LINKS. IT TENDS TO JUSTIFY THE HASTE WITH WHICH ABDALLAH FARHAT WAS INSTALLED AS ACTING INTERIOR MINISTER WHEN THE WHISTLE WAS BLOWN AND TENDS TO INDICATE THAT THE TRAP WAS SPRUNG AFTER CONSIDERABLE ADVANCE ANALYSIS AND PREPARATION. THE BEL HADJ AMOR REVELATIONS, HOWEVER, REPRESENT EVIDENCE THAT THE GOT WAS NOT AWARE OF HOW LONG-PLANNED BELKHODJA'S EVENTUAL MOVE TO POWER HAD BEEN HATCHED. GIVEN THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE BEL HADJ AMOR ADMISSIONS, IF THEY CAN BE SEBstantiated, IT IS HARD TO SEE HOW THE GOT CAN REFRAIN FROM BRIPGING CAPITAL CHARGES AGAINST THOSE INVOLVED. IT ALSO SEEMS INEVITABLE THAT, WHEN ALL THIS INFORMATION BECOMES PUBLIC, TUNISIAN-LIBYAN RELATIONS WILL TAKE ANOTHER NOSEDIVE.

14. ACTION REQUESTED: IF DEPARTMENT PERCEIVES NO OBJECTION PLEASE PASS PARIS ALSO FOR LABATT.

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## Message Attributes

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